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CHAFEE ANNOUNCES FEDERAL GRANT TO HELP RHODE ISLAND PREVENT UNDERAGE DRINKING

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee today announced that the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has awarded \$360,000 to the Rhode Island Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals (MHRH) to help fund the state's Combating Underage Drinking Initiative.

"Underage drinking continues to threaten the health and lives of teens and adults throughout Rhode Island," Chafee said. "Every day, underage drinkers ruin their health, undermine their family relationships, reduce their chances of success in school, and threaten the lives of innocent people on our roads. Rhode Island's Combating Underage Drinking Initiative is a good step in bringing the state's resources together to enforce our consumption laws, and ensure that our children grow up healthy, happy, and safe."

According to the 1998 Rhode Island Adolescent Substance Abuse Survey, alcohol is the leading substance of abuse at all grade levels in Rhode Island. Almost one in four Rhode Island seventh-grade students, almost half of ninth-graders, and almost two thirds of twelfth graders reported using alcohol in the past month. Additionally, 16 percent of eighth graders reported being drunk in the last month, while 41 percent of twelfth graders reported being drunk. Finally, 46 percent of Rhode Island twelfth graders reported riding in a car in the past month with someone who had been drinking alcohol.

Rhode Island's Combating Underage Drinking Initiative is designed to support and enhance efforts to enforce laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol to or the consumption of alcohol by minors.

The Department of MHRH will use the federal funding to achieve the following goals: coordination of a statewide effort to address underage drinking and youth access to alcohol with a focus on environmental prevention strategies; a review of Rhode Island's alcohol beverage control policies and regulations; implementation of best practice models of regulatory strategies for preventing youth access to alcohol; increased enforcement of alcohol beverage sales laws; public advertising to increase the public's perception of risk associated with underage alcohol use; and training for youth, police, juvenile hearing boards, prevention and treatment professionals regarding successful strategies for reducing underage drinking.

Under the DOJ's Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws Block Grant Program, each state received federal funding to develop programs to improve the enforcement of underage drinking laws. States use these funds to support activities in 1 or more of the 3 areas: enforcement, public education activities, and innovative programs.

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